Dumb Fevers, Drowsy Nights And Healthy Soup

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Dumb Fevers, Drowsy Nights And Healthy Soup

by AsilandWriting

Summary

The children get sick and mother hen Giovanni is on the case

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1: How To Get Two Children Sick At The Same, Exact Time

Giovanni should have known it would happen.

He should have known, and he was livid with himself as he stood in front of the mess he had created, his one hand in his hair as he scratched it widely back and forth, while the other was leaning against his hip. He closed his eyes as he grimaced, gritting his teeth, berating himself, asking himself how he could have let it happen. He should have made sure that everything was fine, instead of leaving it be. The voice in his head and the weight in his gut had told him it would turn out the way it did.

Before he could stomp his foot, another tiny sneeze rattled him out of his guilt trip, and he frowned.

“Bless you, Bear Trap.”

“Thanks…”

Molly sniffled once more, the noise of her sucking in slime through her nose grating to the ears. She had not the time to grab for another fresh tissue, the liquid already starting to drip, so she unconsciously brushed her hand under it to stop the droplet from falling onto the table. Her knuckles were covered in snot afterwards and she let her tongue out in disgust, before she used her clean hand to pry the paper out of the box. It was almost empty, the used tissue balls in the wastepaper basket beside her as well as assorted half-used laying around the desk and cash register. When she got a hold, she snapped it out and pressed it first to her sticky hand and then to her face, the blow she let out wet and loud.

Giovanni cringed as she blew again, not needing to imagine how clogged the nose was.

It was literally shut all the way.

“I’m sorry I’m sick,” she then started, folding the tissue and trying to dry the way too red nose, rubbed raw from hours over hours of cleaning it, “I know I’m really gross right now.”

“What are you talking about?! You’re sick, of course you’re gross!” Now he let his foot hit the carpet with a bang, his hands leaning on the desk so he could lean his weight over it and get a closer look at her face. “But you shouldn’t be sorry! I should be, I dragged you out into the rain!”

Molly smiled a bit at Giovanni’s honest, upset face, laughing at the way he was staring down at her. He looked almost like a sad kitten, his hair tufts hanging down and she had to let out another sneeze, this time into her elbow, in her try to giggle.

“But it was worth it, boss! I really liked the walk with the two of you,” she grinned, before she let her head fall a bit to the side in thought, “Even if we waltzed onto private property and

got chased." She pondered, her hand on her cheek. "I did get almost speared…" Then she laughed again. "But the view was great on top of the hill!"

"Still…" He sighed as he leaned back once more, crossing his arms and craning his head to the side, "Jeez… Should have known that after the running for life and hiding in the woods, and then the stupid rain… of course it knocked you out…"

He continued to beat himself up, as he thought back to two days ago, grimacing as the memory made its way back into his head, remembering all the parts where he had gone wrong.

He should have stayed at home that day.

There was no way he was staying at home today.

Giovanni was bored out of his mind and it was high time to change that fact, as he walked towards the city center.

Laying around the house had been fun and all, but with the golden evening sun streaming in, reminding him that there was a world outside that was begging to be vandalized, it was hard to focus. Not only had the air in his room gotten stale, but his mother had been constantly nagging him to do his chores and he hadn't really been able to enjoy his mindless knitting. Since the yarn ball had been running rather thin anyway, he had put on his jacket, his shoes and marched out the door with a small "Bye, mom! See you whenever!", before the door had shut behind him. Immediately after he had known where he was headed, his first idea to break out of his monotonous life (which he had been leading for the span of half an hour) being to visit his most faithful and also youngest minion, standing in front of the toy store with a gleeful expression.

He entered without much fuss, dispensing of kicking it, since he knew Bear Trap was rather jumpy around loud noises, and he let the door jingle carefully, fist grapping the knob and shacking it lightly, so she would hear him enter for sure. One look around and he saw her standing at the register, like usual (sadly), her head snapping up from the hand she was leaning against just in time to look professional enough. She relaxed immediately however and smiled brightly at him, when she realized who had entered.

"Boss!"

"Bear Trap! How's the buying crowd?"

She looked around for a moment, Giovanni noting the small, unsure smile, as she shrugged, before she stretched her hand out towards the center of the room.

"I guess non-existent?"

Now that he was paying attention to his surroundings, it did seem rather empty, and he frowned the tiniest bit, turning on his heels and putting his hands on his hips, as if he was evaluating her response, examining the room. The only things occupying the store were the

two of them and the dust particles flying around, and he noted the few passer-byes by the windows, which were not even glancing into their direction. While he let his eyes wander, he had to let out a small whistle, never not impressed how many, and more importantly well-made, toys stood around, Giovanni always one second away from buying something off from her, before the whistle turned into small hum.

He then noticed the clock on the far wall, realizing the time and he frowned harder.

“It’s 7pm,” he mumbled, crossing his arms as he let his head lean on his shoulder to glance behind him, fixating her with a grim expression, “I thought we agreed you would stop doing overtime.”

“Well… I hoped maybe someone might still walk in.”

Letting out a sigh, she let her shoulders fall.

“But yeah, no dice.”

“Well, anyway!” Giovanni interrupted her, immediately wanting to chase the gloom away and settling his hands on the counter, “How about we get out of here and take a walk?”

“A walk?”

“Yeah! A walk, maybe a crime walk, we could steal something!” At her face, he backtracked. “Or just a regular walk, because it’s autumn, the sun is warm, and I was getting depressed in my four walls. And honestly, this is not much better.”

Molly took a look around herself and she laughed a bit helplessly: “It is kind of sad…”

“See? So come on, we can go and get some fresh air!”

She seemed to ponder over it, but only for a moment, before she rounded the counter, walked towards the door and flipped the sign to closed, grinning at Giovanni.

He practically jumped after her and was trying to drag her from the door, which she was trying to close while being pulled towards the lively streets, laughs falling from her lips as they finally were out of there. Giovanni was overjoyed that he had freed her from a nightshift, proud of himself for coming up with the brilliant thought, swinging his arms and jumping over the cracks on the pavement. She tried to keep up with him, taking two steps in trying to compensate with his single one, parroting his jumps as they avoided other passer-byes as well as lines.

After a few minutes of avoiding lava, Molly on top of a garbage can and Giovanni on a brick wall, he noticed from his vintage point where they were, and he snapped his fingers. Jumping onto a stair railing to grind with his shoes down to the ground again, he made a spur of the moment decision, turning to Molly with a grin.

“How about we invite the nerd?”

“Sylvie?” she questioned, lifting her eyebrow a tad, not really getting why he was proposing it. A small “oh” left her then, as she saw the same office building that he did in the distance, before nodding enthusiastically.

Giovanni was beaming when they walked towards Sylvie’s workplace, hoping he’d still be there at this hour and being rewarded with a flash of white exiting the door. He didn’t see them obviously, since he was about to head the opposite direction, so Giovanni sprinted forward, so he’d be in earshot for Sylvie to hear him scream. Molly flinched a bit and Sylvie looked like he was about to jump out of his skin, as he turned to them, shoulders hunched as if he had been ready to attack whoever had called him. He seemed caught completely off-guard, as he blinked owlishly at them, trying to piece together what was happening.

After the explanation, he still didn’t completely relax.

“A walk?”

Molly hummed in confirmation, Sylvie narrowing his eyes.

“A walk,” he repeated, before he let his eyes drift towards Giovanni, “No strings attached?”

“No! What?” He had his hands beside his head, outstretched, as if he wanted to show his innocence, “Can a criminal not take a walk with his minions on a Thursday autumn evening without it turning into a heist?”

Sylvie stared at him with half-lidded eyes, his mouth in a thin line.

“I’m not your minion.”

“And you did ask if we could go steal something…”

“Details, details.” He puffed his cheeks out, looking down at Molly the tiniest bit betrayed, before he pointed at the doctor, “You coming or not?”

Sylvie let out a suffering sigh, but he knew he couldn’t say no now, since Molly seemed so eager.

“As long as we are not robbing a shop, sure.”

Giovanni easily agreed with a dismissive wave of his hands: “As if! A shop is below my standards!” Then he pointed at the boy, “It’s just a walk, it won’t kill you to get more often out of your house, either. You look whiter than a white pastel crayon.”

“I have important files to fill, they take priority.” Then he looked up towards the sky and then the people around him, all of them chatting and enjoying the breeze, before he pulled at the side of his coat. Golden glitter appeared and disappeared in a blink of an eye, as he straightened it out, before letting out another sigh. “But a break in the sun will do us all good. Vitamin D should be absorbed before the winter, since-”

“Okay, enough talk, more walking. You can write your essay later, poindexter. Time to procrastinate.”

Sylvie gawked at him, before he was pulled by the shoulder, an angry huff leaving his mouth. He looked back at Giovanni, telling him that this didn't mean he was about to leave his work or papers unfinished, or that he was slacking off, but Giovanni just rolled his eyes at the added information, as he pushed the kids forward.

It had been his idea to go out but left the decision of where they were headed to the other two. At first, they had wanted to go to the beach, but since the wind had picking up and the sand would have all slapped them in the face, they had gone the opposite way. Neither of them was used to the area, showing each other what they saw, shops, houses, assorted smaller details like signs and tiny weeds in the middle of streets, before they had reached the outskirts. Nothing but the wilting fields of the Sweet Jazz farmers was in their sight, the crops all gathered and ready to be covered in snow soon.

When Molly saw the barn in the distance, she peeped carefully up, asking to go look at the animals.

Soon enough they were leaning over the electric fence, careful to not touch it, and trying to see behind it, dots of animals walking in the distance. Molly tiptoed a bit to see better through the orange wires, watching the horses graze, the sun already far gone and dusk dimming the sight. Giovanni offered to lift her up, but she declined, telling him that the animals were just too far away to see, a small pout forming on her lips. Giovanni then took notice of Sylvie moving his glasses up and down his nose in a try to see better as well and he pondered how he could fix the situation.

Since Giovanni was not one to let them leave without a satisfying end, he knew the goal to see the animals clearly would be scored by getting closer. The notion of petting at least a single one of the horses was enough for him to say that it would be worth the trouble.

So, he decided to jump over the fence.

"Boss!" Molly yelped, as he moved past her and Sylvie turned so fast, lightning looked slow.

Since Giovanni misjudged the height, his steam only carried him up for a few extra inches, one foot swinging over easily, the other however caught itself in the coils. Thanks to his shoes there was luckily no shock and he only lost his balance for a second, stretching his arms out to catch himself. Grabbing her coat at the hood, Molly looked like she was close to panicking, thinking he was about to get fried and Sylvie had his arms stretched out as if he wanted to pull him back, eyes wide. Ultimately however, he crossed victoriously, the kids still alarmed but relaxing as he stood tall. He shushed them, before they could say anything, telling them he was fine, and that petting wasn't a crime, pointing behind him.

"Breaking and entering private property is, in fact, a crime," Sylvie explained, his arms crossed now, grabbing tightly to his sleeves.

"Did I break anything?"

"Well… no."

"So? I just entered! No breaking!"

The boy gave up, head in his hands.

Molly was fast to follow Giovanni, holding her hands up and was helped by being grabbed under her arms and swung over the fence, her feet tucked in so she wouldn't do the same mistake as him. She landed with a soft thud in the grass, before Giovanni turned and held his arms out, waiting on Sylvie to do the same as Molly. The boy's face had been way less enthusiastic, pushing his glasses up his nose in embarrassment as he had gotten back on his feet, pouting at the fact how easily Giovanni had manhandled him.

Almost immediately after they reached the horses, Molly excitedly bouncing in place, watching one of them come closer, curiously sniffing at her. She stood still, to not shoo the animal away, before she slowly lifted her arm and gave it a good pet on the head, apologizing that she had no food with her. The horse didn't seem to mind at all, letting out a breath, neighing afterwards, and Molly giggled as her hair got ruffled.

Giovanni watched her with a wide grin as she let her hands brush over the short and smooth fur, walking around the massive creature in circles, before he glanced to the side and startled.

Sylvie, who was surrounded by 5 sheep, was crouching down, his one hand in his pocket, the other out for the animals to sniff at. Giovanni had no idea where those had come from so fast, looking left and right as if he was being pranked, knowing they were the real deal. (If they had been Sylvie's, they would have been glowing yellow and he was pretty sure he was not getting blind yet.)

When Sylvie caught his confused gaze, he shrugged.

"They like me."

Giovanni sweat dropped: "No kidding..."

"Uh… guys?"

Both boys turned to Molly, the yeah both stuck in their throats as they saw a farmer run towards them.

A very angry farmer with a big hayfork in his hands.

They couldn't hear him at first, only saw the blue green man move, but soon enough the wind carried his voice over, so they could hear the hoarse: "GET OFF MY LAND!!!"

All three of them bristled in fear, too shocked to move for a second. Neither of them really knew what to do and as the dot got taller and angrier, Giovanni, who realized that there was no way to talk this out, screamed a deafening:

"SCATTER!!!"

All of them ran into different directions, the farmer shooing sheep as well as horse to the side, standing bewildered in the middle before he high tailed after one of them. Giovanni realized fast that he was safe, but also that the children could not escape the same way as they had entered and he made a U-turn, trying to figure out a plan. He realized he needed to run after

Molly, which had been the one chosen to be chased, cursing under his breath and asking himself why the guy had to go after the smallest of them. Luckily, even though tiny, she was fast and ran in zigzags through the tall grass, the guy behind her huffing and puffing. He looked like he was going to blow a fuse, as he readied his hayfork, prepared to throw and a chill ran down Giovanni's spine.

Somehow Giovanni had managed to out-speed both then, adrenalin and the thought of "Oh god, oh no" pumping through him, as he picked Molly up in full speed, before he sprinted with her under his arm towards Sylvie, who was pointing at the barn like their lives depended on it.

Well, that was not too far from the truth.

When the three of them toppled in, Sylvie slapped the door shut, putting a broom as wooden blocker in right after, gaining them time as they then clambered up a ladder to get on the upper half of the barn in a panic. Between the hay and rusting tools all three gasped for breath, trying to slow their hearts that were beating out of their chests. Giovanni had carried Molly upstairs, so now he finally let her settle on the floor beside him, his chest heaving, before he suddenly pointed at Sylvie accusingly, his breath coming short.

"Dude! Use Big Dream or whatever it's called! You can sweep him off the floor!"

"I can't! I'm not going to destroy someone's property which WE entered!" Sylvie spat back, eyes wide as saucers, as he threw his arms out, "I learned my lesson at the museum thank you very much!" He then pointed at the older. "Use your stupid soup and get us out of here then!"

"It's NOT stupid!"

"Yeah?! Then do something useful with it!"

"Are you out of your mind?! If I burn the guy, he WILL kill us! And I can't teleport carrying BOTH of you, yo-yo man!"

"Why?!"

"Heavy…"

Sylvie slapped his hand to his forehead.

"This is your fault, I told you it would be breaking and entering!"

"Well, why did you break in with me??"

"Did I have a choice?!" Sylvie pointed down, voice turning vicious, "You are the villain leader of us "minions", so we listen to you, isn't that so?!"

"Yes, it is!" Giovanni crossed his arms, "But you could have protested harder…"

Sylvie was looking like he was about to strangle him, before Molly jumped in, lifting herself off the floor with a pleading voice.

“Guys… We need to stay calm and think of a way out!”

That seemed to shut both up, as all three of them looked around, wracking their brains, trying to come to a solution that would neither destroy the barn nor turn them to shish kebab. Molly was grabbing her shoulders, trying to keep her breath steady, before she noticed a soft breeze behind her, glancing over her shoulder. The roof apparently was open from both sides, covered by hay cubes, but when she made her way over and pulled the dried grass away, she realized that the hole was big enough for them to go through.

When she had called the two boys over to inspect her finding, she pointed downwards, her eyes wide: “Giovanni, can you use your Epithet to slow our fall if we jump?”

“I guess…?” He leaned over, as if he was trying to calculate their chances, “I still wouldn’t be able to teleport with the two of you, but I’m pretty sure the slowing down part can work!”

After agreeing on their escape plan, all three of them started to throw the hay balls to the side to have more room, pushing the stacks to the side as best they could, while sudden banging started outside. It sounded as if the guy was trying to ram his way in and Molly flinched hard as the sound got louder and louder with every bang and scream, shacking the walls of the barn. Finally, the broom broke and the man fell in, body colliding with the floor as the three looked down in fear.

Loosing no time, Giovanni grabbed both children around their waists, both letting out startled yelps as they each gripped his arms in return, and he did a running start to kick the last remaining hay cube out of the way.

With a mighty yell he dashed forward, the hay bursting into its grass blade pieces, all three of them sailing through the opening into the night.

The steam, that had shot from his feet, let the farmer cough, fogging up his sight, as well as let out an approving hum out of the man’s throat afterwards, as it made its way to his tongue. Trying in vain to find them in the fog, he let out a last warning, his hayfork burying itself in the floor beside him.

Molly couldn’t help herself as she let out a big, happy cheer as they flew, hands in fists above her, while Sylvie looked like he was about to scream his head off.

Landing safely in the grass, the fence behind them, they all sighed in relief, before Giovanni grabbed them by their sleeves and told them to take to their heels. He only let go of them, after they had run up a hill, half the forest behind them, having hoped and also managed to get the owner of the field off their trail.

Both children were breathing harder than a steam train, sweating literal bullets and peeling themselves out of their respective coats, throwing them down to the ground. Molly was holding her hand over her heart and leaning backwards, while Sylvie was crouching, hand on the side of his throat, both feeling their pulse beating underneath their palms.

There while Giovanni, a bit more used to running for his life (and also being taller so less steps) looked behind him, a last check to see if they really had made it.

“Man… that could have gone better…”

Sighing, Giovanni was about to apologize, but Molly started to laugh suddenly, her head in her hands, the hiccups she was letting out leaning on hysterical. Sylvie watched her at first blankly, before a snort left his mouth, followed right after with his hands going to his stomach, leaning forward and almost loosing balance. Both had tears appearing in their eyes, Giovanni not entirely sure how he should react, before he laughed, too, the three of them repeating what they just had went through, not able to believe how they had managed to escape.

“Did you guys see that?! He wanted to throw a hayfork at me!”

“Did you seriously scream scatter??! Where do you have that from??”

“How even did you manage to ram the door shut; it was twice as big as you!?”

Neither of them could stop, as they scream laughed at each other, and at some point, they broke down into howls, Molly finally tilting over and landing on the grass. Her laughter was paralyzing her into a giggly mess and he two boys followed right after, as they landed on their butts and yelled into the night, all of them completely drunk-on adrenalin. Only after what felt like hours, they regained their breath, looking down from the hill they had saved themselves on and staring out at the glittering, now in complete darkness cloaked city.

“That was fun.”

Giovanni was pleased when Molly made the statement, her eyes shut as if she was about to doze off. Sylvie nodded in agreement, which was more than Giovanni had expected, and he inwardly cheered.

Double win then.

They managed to take in the view in wonderment for a few blessed minutes, before drips startled them out of their stupor. They all looked up at the sky, noting that there were no stars, but probably a bunch of grey clouds as the drops fell on them, Sylvie flinching as one bounced off his frames. At first it was a soft drizzle, but soon enough it was as if the sky decided to pour down buckets, and the children hurried to put their coats back on, hoodie caps tightly thrown over their heads to keep the cold out. After they had tried to bundle themselves up, Giovanni led them both down the mountain, still giddy over their adventure.

That really was fun.

Looking back on it fully actually, he couldn’t deny it, it had been a great night.

But he still felt like garbage.

He really, really should have made sure she had been warm when going home, making sure she changed her clothes and taken a shower and eaten something after the wild chase. Molly’s home had been closer, so she had told them she would be fine as she stepped into the

shop and Sylvie had waved him off a few streets later, telling him he would make it to his apartment safe from here on out, knowing that Giovanni would take way longer to his house if he followed the whole way to his doorsteps.

He should have, because now Molly looked like she had been rubbing her nose with sandpaper.

“How is it not bleeding yet, you shaved off like… 2 layers of skin, at least.”

Molly looked sheepish at that, as she shrugged: “If it’s itchy, I rub it.”

Giovanni slapped his hand to his face, realizing once more, that yeah, even if she managed to keep the family business aloft and knowing her way around adult terms, which he needed to come to grasp himself, she was still 12. She had no idea how important it was to not rub the nose but pet it softly when you were sick, because of course it would rub 2 layers of skin away if she didn’t. She must have not been sick in a long time for her to not know and he felt worse, knowing he had done that to her.

He let out a groan as she let out another sneeze, and he was about to glare, when he realized something very important. As it dawned on him, his body went rigid, his one hand that had been on his cheek in the air beside him, the other holding his elbow, his back straight as an arrow. His mouth opened once, then twice, before he glanced down at the girl, who was curiously smiling at him.

“Why are you not in bed?”

“Huh?”

“Bear Trap!” Giovanni looked devastated, his whole body snapping up in attention, his hands wandering to his head as pure panic made its way across his face. “Why are you working?! You are sneezing your brains out, why are you at the register???”

“Oh?” She looked around her. “It’s my shift, you know?”

The audacity.

The sheer gall to sound this dismissive.

Giovanni was about to pull his hair out as he stared at her with a wild look.

“What do you mean it’s your shift?? Didn’t you tell your dad you’re sick?!!”

“Well, I tried, but he left the house and since nobody is here, I decided-“

“No, no, no, no, no. You know what? NO. Forget this.” He stomped his foot again, and Molly looked down to see steam going off from there, actual anger pulsing through his veins. “You? You are coming with me and I will strap you to my bed.”

“Oh? You don’t have to; I just got the sniffles. I’m fine!”

She gave him another brilliant smile, and he bit down a scream as he closed his eyes, trying to not look upset to make her think she was the one he was angry at. He honestly was only angry with himself and the fact that he had made her sick. Before she could ask, he stood tall once more and let his hands hover in front of him. He took a deep breath, letting it out in a single, deep blow, before he let his arms fall and settle on his hips, Molly watching him in a mix of confusion and worry.

“Nothing is fine,” he stated, his voice carrying authority but his eyes clear worry, “We will close shop, I will bring you to my house and make you some actual, warm food. Make you drink some medicine and cover your nose in cream, too, because one rub more and you will leak red all over the carpet.”

“But, boss- “

Molly tried to object, but she was hushed by a pointing finger to her lips, starring cross eyed at the hand that had moved there in a blink of an eye.

“Nope, we are not discussing this.” His face softened. “Please?”

His words made her fall quiet and she realized that he really just wanted her to lay down and get rest. Thinking about it, it sounded nice right about now; to lay down. She was also hungry, the mention of food making her stomach growl and reminding her that she had only eaten a bowl of pretty stale cereal. Standing still made her legs feel wobbly, her hands were clammy and cold, she felt sweat roll down her back and her eyes felt heavy, her whole being craving a bed. Finally, she let out a small, defeated, but also truly relived, sigh as she nodded, pushing the finger from her face.

“You’re right… okay,” she smiled a bit helplessly, “I really should have stayed in bed…”

“Thank the stars above me and in your hair, you see reason, Bear Trap,” Giovanni clapped his hand over his heart, as if he had just been told that his mother had in fact not just told him to clean out his baseball equipment, “Here I thought I would need to wrestle you to my room.”

“No need. I’m outrun and cornered.”

“Yeesh, you sound like I just hunted you for sport…”

“Just let me leave a note for dad.”

Giovanni rolled his eyes at that, not at her of course, but the fact that she was even bothering. However, he knew that she was a good child, way too good, and of course she wouldn’t make her father worry for leaving without any indication of where she had gone. A pencil scratch later she put the paper on the now clean table, all tissues now in the bin, clearly visible for anybody coming in.

Wouldn’t be enough for the dumb geezer, but Molly didn’t ask for Giovanni’s opinion.

He shook his head instead, before he tilted it to the door.

“You think you can stay on your legs and follow me or want to do the good old piggy-back ride?”

She didn’t give an answer, instead she moved from behind the register and lifted her hands, Giovanni rolling his eyes. Then he crouched down, back towards her as she climbed up, her arms curling around his neck, while he hocked his elbows under her knees. He shifted her up a bit more, before he slowly stood up, looking beside him to see her leaning her head on his shoulder.

“You good?”

She nuzzled her head into his neck.

“Perfect.”

“Alright then, let’s ditch this place!”

With that, he kicked the door open this time, the little bell ringing their exit out, before it fell shut behind them. He didn’t mean to bother closing it, but then he thought about how funny it would be if her dad actually got locked out, turning around on his heel and picking up the keys from their hiding spot. Molly watched him remove the plant and thanked him for thinking of the safety of the shop, Giovanni snorting out a laugh inside of his brain, and letting out a “you’re welcome” in reality, before he shut it and pocketed the keys in his trousers. Molly would need them later when she went home anyway, so he wasn’t essentially stealing them, and it was not his fault when the stupid guy didn’t have spares.

He left Molly to fend for herself?

Well! He would leave him to fend for himself!

He felt pretty confident then, as he made his way through the streets, Molly dozing on and off on his shoulder, sometimes a sniff, sometimes a sneeze sneaking out of her. Luckily no one on the streets seemed to mind as the two walked through, the sight probably not too unusual, just a guy with a tiny gal on his back, making their way downtown. He actually enjoyed the walk, humming under his breath as he thought about what the two of them could do to make her feel better as fast as possible.

He was sure his mom still had some stuff in the cabinets, and he tried to remember where the thermometer was, when Molly spoke up, very quietly, muffled by his jacket.

“…?”

“Huh? You need to speak up, Bear Trap, I didn’t understand a single word.” He shrugged apologetically. “Could you repeat?”

This time she snapped her head up and sneezed into her elbow, before she grimaced at the stinging feeling in her nose, trying to keep the ants that seemed to now crawl in there to keep at bay.

“I asked if we should check on Sylvie…” She pulled her nose up, trying to take a breath through it and only one side successfully pulling air in. “Maybe he got the sniffles, too? Or maybe he wants to hang out, if he doesn’t.”

“You’re sick, Bear Trap… You shouldn’t have too much company right now; you’re filled with germs.”

“Oh.”

She sounded a bit defeated.

“But you have a good point…”

Giovanni then pulled his mouth to the side a bit in thought.

“Even if he isn’t… It would still be funny to visit him and present you. What do you bet he will act like you’re radioactive?” He laughed under his breath. “Seriously though, we can text him if you want, you got your phone with you?”

She petted her coat pocket, where her phone probably was, a soft smile forming. “Got it right here.” Then she pulled it out, her hand flipping it so she could get to the home button and let the screen light up to life. “I’ll call him, that’s faster.”

Shortly after the phone was ringing, Molly waiting patiently, while Giovanni was tapping his foot up and down at the crosswalk, waiting for the light to turn green. He followed with his eyes how the cars sped up and down, counting the seconds under his breath and hating the fact that it always took for-freaking-ever to get to the other side. He was watching a bright blue car go by, wondering who would drive such a thing in the first place, before the signature “Bing” came on and they could move, Molly still waiting for the other to pick up.

When the call came through, it wasn’t Sylvie on the other end, but a woman, telling her he hadn’t come into work, yet. Molly was quick to thank her, as she changed tactics and called him on his personal phone. When she was met with a mechanical voice, that told her the time was up, she tried again, insistent as she waited for Sylvie’s voice. But Giovanni was waiting at the third crosswalk and could feel her grip his hoodie, his head craning back.

“He’s not picking up?”

“No…” she answered, pressing the call button a fifth time, “He always picks up…”

“You sure?” Giovanni frowned now as he was pushed by the other pedestrians, Molly holding the phone closer to her ear with both of her hands, so she wouldn’t miss any words that might come through, “He’s probably working on his stupid papers. Or maybe he’s in the shower or something.”

Molly looked unsure, as she then held her phone to her face, looking at it with a mild sad look.

“Or he’s sick…”

Aw, hell.

Giovanni was defenseless, he couldn't go on with that disappointed expression on her and the small guilt that formed, knowing very well she could be right. So, he grabbed a lamppost and swung his body around it so he would turn 180 degrees into the opposite direction, the few people in his way jumping to the side in fright. Molly had almost let her phone fall when he had turned, losing her balance, but she was fast to slide the device back where it belonged and grab the white tufts of fur, as she glanced at Giovanni with a confused expression.

"Your house is that way."

She pointed behind them, but she got a shrug instead of a reply.

"Oh, I know. We are taking the scenic route." When she was about to ask what he meant, he ran over her question, pointing forwards, as if he was manning a battleship. "We're going to visit the nerd and check on him with our own eyes! Scenic enough for you?"

The grin she gave him was reason enough to walk some extra miles, as he settled back into leaning forward, pushing Molly up once more to get comfortable, before they backtracked. It wasn't too bad, since they were leaving the center and way less cars where speeding down the roads. Plus, Molly seemed to be more awake now, as she told Giovanni about how school went, the tiny naps she had taken before she had asked for the phone call already working wonders. She even asked to be let down to her feet, but that was a step too much for Giovanni, as he told her she could do that when they were at Sylvie's.

At the entrance of the skyscraper he let her down finally and they went to the elevator, Molly pressing the button, before she almost hit her head against all of them as another sneeze threw her forward. Giovanni grabbed her just in time so she wouldn't knock herself out, both sharing a small laugh.

Then there was only a thin door separating them from Sylvie and Giovanni watched as Molly knocked first carefully, then, as if she was changing her mind, more insistently, 3 loud bangs making their way through. He was proud of her as she looked up at him, as if she was asking if she had done well, and he pulled both of his thumbs up. Then they waited again, trying to listen if anything was moving on the other side, greeted with eerie silence.

"He should have heard us, right?"

"Yeah…?"

"Is he home at all?"

"No clue," Giovanni scratched his chin, his stomach suddenly dropping, "I didn't bring him home since he said he would be fine… And if he isn't at work…?" Now he started slightly to panic, "What if he didn't get home at all…?"

Molly started to get unsure as well, as her eyes fixated on the closed door, before she tried her luck once more, banging against the wood, heart rapidly going faster. She really didn't want

to assume the worst, but her being sick and also tired and also really worried were not a good combination, about to walk circles like a tiger in a cage.

But before she could think of lifting one foot, Giovanni stepped forward and he peeped through the keyhole, as if he was trying to see into the room. Molly watched him, trying to calm a bit down, while Giovanni was squinting his eyes. All he could see was pitch black darkness and he leaned back, fixating the door with hint of determination. Then he started rummaging through his pockets, Molly blinking as he pulled out a can opener.

“What are you going to do with that?”

“We are highly professional criminals, my dear Bear Trap! And I’m going to give us an entrance!”

“I don’t think you can lockpick his door with a can opener…”

“Who said I was going to lockpick? Do I look like I can do that?”

Molly wanted to answer honestly, but that would have been hurtful, so she kept her mouth shut. Instead she watched him use his Epithet, creating his “lava” in one hand and heating up the metal in his other, realizing what he was trying to do. She wanted to stop him, knowing Sylvie would get upset to find his door burned and cut in, trying to grab his arm. He was about to use it on the wood, the metal already leaning in, before the two heard noises, stopping in their tracks.

They sprung to their feet, as the door in front of them creaked open, a disheveled Sylvie blearily looking at them.

Neither party said anything, as Giovanni looked at the boy, cringing inwardly as he took him in. He looked essentially like death warmed up, if he was completely honest to himself. He was in a white shirt plus patterned pajama pants, his usual coat draped over his shoulders and rolled up at the sleeves up to his elbows. His glasses where askew on his face and his hair looked like it had first been licked by a cow and dried with a way too hot blow drier, standing up in every direction humanly possible. He would have almost said it looked cute, if it weren’t for the fact that he was hunched over, his eyes empty and clearly unfocused.

Before either of the three could say anything, a deep-rooted cough ripped through the boy’s throat and he pressed his hand over to stifle it unsuccessfully.

“Well,” Giovanni then uttered, both children looking up at him.

“Dang it.”

Chapter 2: Snapshots

“Thanks, that’s what I get for a greeting. A 'dang it' of all things.”

The usual heat behind the words was non-existent, the voice too roughed up to annunciate the emotion, swinging more between whiney and exhausted. Sylvie glanced up at Giovanni however and what was not in the voice, was at least partly visible on the face, the glare half-hearted but enough for the older to frown. He was about to tell him to get some manners, to have respect for your elders, before Molly interrupted him, Giovanni stepping a bit to the side so she could lean forward.

“Hi, Sylvie.”

The doctor’s eyes moved forward then, and he watched Molly wave at him, before he lifted his own hand.

“Hey.” He pointed to her nose. “It got you, too, huh?”

“Yep, we’re both gross.”

“Fantastic.” He let his head fall into his hand, the other gripping the doorframe. “That’s what I hoped my day would shape up to be.” He sighed, his sarcastic tone leaving with it, as he smiled a bit amused at her. “You look like you got thrown under a bus.”

“Me? You look like someone tried to use you as washcloth.” She grinned back, before another sneeze rattled her and she let her hand brush over her nose, both boys cringing away from her and her snot.

Neither of the two had the hindsight to take the few unused tissues with them, so Sylvie let them enter, looking for his own stash in the cabinet. While the two stood in the living room, Molly watching him crouch down and rummaging, taking out a new pack from a corner, Giovanni glanced at the kitchen table next door, various papers laying around haphazardly stacked on top of each other.

It’s always a bit of a mind-blowing fact that Sylvie was handling these kinds of matters in a breeze, Giovanni humming under his breath at the thought. He had no clue what those papers were about, if they were his therapy notes he took for his patients, if they were theories he was constructing around his findings or simply tax forms he had to fill; the list was endless. No matter however what they were, Sylvie seemed always to be diligent and ahead in time to fill them out, unlike Giovanni who had never held a tax paper in his whole, entire life. When Molly mentioned doing them, Giovanni was flabbergasted, even more so when Sylvie offered to help her out with them if she had trouble.

Maybe he should ask them how to do it, so he could learn and fill out all three of theirs.

From the sounds of it, it would suck, but hey, he could try to lift the load a tiny bit.

Or maybe he should just stick to being a villain, roping the kids in, that was easier.

Yeah, way easier.

For a second he wondered what those papers were even doing there, before he widened his eyes, not unlike he had done at the shop an hour ago, and his head snapped forward the boy, who was about to hand over the tissue pack to Molly.

“Were you working?”

Sylvie glanced up at the pressed tone of the voice, a small cough leaving him as he followed the outstretched arm towards his table. Then he shrugged, nodding for a moment, before shacking it like an afterthought.

“I was working yesterday.”

Giovanni squinted a moment at him, taking in his appearance before he suspiciously continued his cross-examination.

“How long have you been working?”

“Like… 3 hours?”

“And then you went to sleep?”

“Yes?”

“You fell asleep at the table, didn’t you?”

“…You can’t prove anything.”

Giovanni wanted to scream into his hands as Molly dabbed her nose carefully, cringing a bit as she scowled at the boy beside her.

“That’s not healthy. At least I went to bed.”

“But you tried to work!!!” Giovanni was about to smash something. “You guys are terrible! How in the world did you survive this long?!”

“Luck?”

“Spite.”

The children peeked from the corners of their eyes at each other, while Giovanni groaned, his hands moving over his face and pulling the skin with it, before it snapped back into place as he let go of his cheeks. Glaring at the table afterwards, he marched towards it, arms sweeping up the papers in a single movement into his arms, before he stacked them together, 2 loud bangs to settle them all neatly. Then he set them down in the corner, leaning down to take the few that had fluttered to the carpet probably after Sylvie had shuffled his way to the door.

Snatching the last sheet from under the table, he put them all on top of the pile, before he weighted them with the one pen that had rolled to the far corner of the floor.

Now it made sense why Sylvie hadn't heard Molly call, his phone must have been in his bedroom and he had spent the night laying at the kitchen table.

Workaholics, both of them.

He sneered at the paper stack, as if he could make it vanish into the abyss, while Sylvie made his way beside him, blinking a bit.

"Thank you. You didn't have to clean up. I wanted to- "

He was swept off his feet before he could even think of his next word to say, Giovanni holding him outstretched in front of him under his armpits. Sylvie looked like a startled kitten, arms up to his ears as he unceremoniously was carried through the living room like a limp ragdoll, Molly following them in step, before he was thrown into his bedroom and was told to change. Giovanni then closed the door and Molly and he waited for the boy to do so, the mumbles that carried through resembling an irritated hissing.

He really should have put those guys to bed.

They couldn't even make sure they slept right, time for an intervention.

The moment Sylvie stepped out, now fully clothed and as presentable as a 15-year old boy with a hacking cough and a crumpled doctor's coat could look, Giovanni shooed the two out of the door, stealing Sylvie's keys he was pulling out and closing the door for him. Then he shoved them into the pocket where Molly's house keys lay and at Sylvie's remark to give them back, he shook his head.

"No way. You two are coming with me and only when I deem you two 100 percent healthy, ready and good to go, I will let you go."

Sylvie looked like he was about to punch him in the chest, so he could get his keys back, but Molly seemed excited, as she took his lifting fist and held it between her own, trying to appease him.

"It will be fine. Now we can be gross together!"

"…wonderful."

Giovanni only snorted out a hum at the oh so enthusiastic response, before he took both by the shoulder and pushed them slowly forward, leading them to the elevator.

Somehow, he ended up with two sick kids on his hands.

Now… did his brain remember right, and his mom was gone for the week, or was that a no?

It was surprising.

Both kids knew what Giovanni's room looked like, since he was always the one to invite them over, insisting to hang out, but somehow, they still were always a bit baffled to find that nothing had changed. He still had his desk and his posters, filled with sport stars, rock bands and baseball facts, all in the same place as the last time they visited him. The wardrobe was always at the same side of the room, as well as the race car bed, the carpet well-worn out. Molly always felt like she had to prepare for something to be out of place, every time she entered the door, to see something gone or moved, but even walking through the living room and up the stairs, the pictures and couch and the TV were always like they were when she left.

It felt nice to know she could come here, and everything was just like always, it felt comforting.

Felt kind of like coming home.

Something somber settled in her chest, before Giovanni startled her out of her thoughts, as he rummaged around his bathroom, mumbling under his breath.

"It has to be here; mom leaves it always here…"

"What are you looking for?"

With a triumphant "Aha!" Giovanni brushed Sylvie's question aside and finally held the thermometer above him. With a slight flick of his hand he shook it to get the liquid flowing, before he motioned for Molly to come closer. Both children stood in the middle of the room, the tiniest bit lost, but she followed his lead as she walked towards him. She peeled herself out of her coat then and lay it carefully on the floor, before she got the stick handed and she settled it under her armpit. She still stood, so Giovanni petted her on the back, so she would get the hint to sit on his bed. As soon as she did with her feet pulled up and cross-legged, Giovanni grinned satisfied.

"First we'll see how the temperature for the two of you is doing and then I get to cooking."

"Do you need help?" Molly asked automatically, only for Giovanni to shake his head immediately after.

"Absolutely not, I will make you bundle up in front of the TV. No way you two are doing ANY more work today."

"But cooking isn't really work… We all need to eat, so it's kind of necessary?"

"And washing my clothes isn't a chore either, sure, Bear Trap, sure."

With a small wave of his hands he asked her to give the thermometer back and he peered at the numbers, letting out an approving hum.

"Looks like you'll be fine, you just need to sleep the bug off and be careful to be warm enough. Get that coat back on you."

Instead of letting her fetch it, he leaned down and picked it up, spreading and laying it around her shoulders, so she could move her arms into the sleeves. Then Giovanni made Sylvie stand up from the desk chair he was sitting in, busy with lazily reading the notes that were scattered around the criminal's desk. Most of them were reminders for meetings with his other "minions" as well as recipes, places to rob and post it notes from his mother. At the call, he stood up and settled beside Molly, while Giovanni shook the instrument to cool it off again. Deciding he was leaving his doctors coat on, he took the thermometer from Giovanni's hand, pushed it under his shirt and under his arm, letting it rest there.

"But if you're cooking, can't we do at least something else to help with? I feel pretty fine!"

"Pretty fine isn't fine, plus! This is my house, and my house, my rules!" He then put a hand over his heart. "What kind of miserable host would I, Giovanni Potage, be if I made you help me? The only thing I really want from you, the both of you, is to lay down and chill. Even if only for a few hours because you-, "he pointed at her, then at Sylvie, who was wordlessly watching the exchange, "Have no idea what relaxing even means."

"That's not true! I relax with my friends all the time!"

"You need to show me that evidence, Bear Trap."

"I can give you a seashell if you want! I found a pretty, pink one last time I hung out at the beach!"

"Oh, it's pink?"

The excitement in his voice stilled the second the thermometer beeped, and Sylvie pulled it out. He tried to glance at it first himself, but Giovanni stole it with a whisk of his fingers, whistling through his teeth.

"Alright, you got a bit worse off, but nothing tragic."

"Nice," Sylvie dead panned.

Another cough, wet and probably the grossest one yet in Giovanni's opinion, and this time he looked dizzy after he stopped, blinking before he pushed a hand under his glasses to rub at his eyes. He looked like he was pretty much ready to drop, and it wasn't surprising. Since Molly had lost her energy after one third of the trip back, she had taken the piggy-back ride again, which left Sylvie to walk beside the other two. He hadn't complained of course, since on one hand it was Molly and on the other, he was probably too "mature" to be carried around anyway, even if Giovanni had offered to switch.

He decided that food was now the perfect thing to get some energy back into both of them.

"Please remind me why you are doing this."

"Isn't it obvious?"

Sylvie glanced around the kitchen, his eyes fixating on the materials strewn about, knives and board and vegetables alike. He didn't even have a double take at the who knows how many spice bottles littering the table behind Giovanni, since he had watched him pull all of them out. Half-lidded and clearly done with his life, he lifted his eyes back up at the older, confusion starting to cross his face.

"Please remind me still. I need to hear it out of your mouth, so I don't have to sound ridiculous."

Giovanni pouted at that, before he crossed his arm and hovered above the way too young doctor.

"Since you must have gone completely deaf thanks to your cold, I'm telling you again. I decided to make food for you guys."

Molly lifted her hand hesitantly then, as if she was in class, and Giovanni pointed at her, so she could speak up. She then let her hand fall, announcing a bit unsure: "So, you're making soup, right?" She looked at Sylvie, to confirm her answer and at his nod, she said it a bit more loudly, "We said we wanted to eat soup, since you know, we're sick. And your Epithet is soup, so- "

"But there are so many varieties of soup! And we need to make sure you get the perfect kind!"

The fact that he was barking that out in the middle of who knows how many vegetables, spices, and other utensils in a kitchen, which had room for maybe one other person; it had something of a surreal quality to it.

"Doesn't your Epithet allow you to make any kind of soup anyway?" Sylvie then pointed out, fingers settled on his chin in thought, "Why would you need to have fresh ingredients or a pot or anything, really. You could just provide us with it, can't you? That is mainly why we asked you to do it in the first place."

"So? Can't I just make soup from scratch?"

"Of course you can, but why bother? …Unless you are worried about your stamina. I can't imagine your body liquids being the primary source of it, since dehydration is nothing you have to dabble with. But maybe your body heat might suffer, since you need to bring it to a boil? Plus… it has to be variable…"

He frowned, Molly blinking at him, while Giovanni lifted an eyebrow.

"Since your body… You mentioned once you sweat it out, but then you'd have to drink huge amounts of water to keep your levels high, so that makes no sense. Do you form it by using the air around you? Maybe through distillation and combining molecules instead…" He snapped his fingers. "Of course! Soup is nothing but water after all!"

"Excuse you?! It's not just lame water!" Giovanni looked actually offended, as he threw his arms up and then around himself, "It's got stuff going on in there! It has so much stuff going

on in there, you can't even count how many pieces of stuff there are! Water has nothing on soup, it's lame!"

"You're right, it isn't purely water…" Now he was back to thinking mode, "However, I am able to create counting sheep out of the ether, maybe your "stuff" can, too."

"Well, look, smarty pants. I don't know how to break it to you, but Epithets are pretty much magic, so please don't try to force me to analyze this with you."

"It's not magic!" Sylvie denied loudly, before a harsh cough followed.

Molly was petting his back softly to help him get his breath back, while Giovanni flinched a bit at the phlegm that was swallowed after, reminding himself for later to make Sylvie cough that stuff out into a sink. It was on one hand super gross and it also was not the best way to get the germs lost if he kept swallowing them down. Sylvie looked offended still as he put a hand to his throat, before he sighed through his, lucky still half-decent free, nose.

"It's a phenomenon we can't entirely explain, yet. That is why I'm trying to figure it out. If we knew more, then less people would suffer under the consequences from having one."

"I just wanted to ask what kind of soup you want." Giovanni pointed beside him on the counter to a bunch of broccolis, his face mirroring Sylvie's annoyance, as well as concern, "But hey, if you want to muse over the world, be my guest, I can choose for you."

Knowing that arguing would lead to nothing, Sylvie looked at Molly.

"I'd rather have it her choice, I'm not picky."

"Oh! Huh…"

She had to think for a while, her hand over her mouth as she pondered, before she realized a crucial detail.

"I won't be able to taste the soup anyway. My nose is clogged."

Giovanni put a hand to his forehead, as he sighed.

"You two are really not making this easy." Then he walked towards the vegetables, examining the display he made for himself with a thoughtful expression. "Alright, since neither of you have any idea, I shall. Now… Nothing too spicy, nothing too salty and it should be liquid enough for you to swallow, four-eyes, since the throat of yours is just as abused by sandpaper as Molly's nose."

"Can't deny that," Sylvie replied, regretting saying it as he felt his heartbeat in his chords, "I should have kept my mouth shut."

"You'll learn one day!"

Molly tried to not giggle, she really, honestly did, but she failed, her shoulders shacking too much and Sylvie send her a withering look. However, they both then trailed with their eyes

after Giovanni's hand, who was hovering over the different items, mumbling. The fact that he was being so diligent in finding the right ingredients made Molly feel a bit guilty, since she wouldn't be able to enjoy it anyway. Giovanni was right, there were a lot of soups, too many to count, but she only ever used the package kind. But it was obvious he decided that wouldn't do, looking for fresh food and she tried to think of something simple to do. She didn't want to eat anything fancy and make his work harder as it already would be.

Trying to remember the last time she was sick; a picture came to mind, and she tugged at Giovanni's coat to get his attention.

"Why not go with carrot soup?" Molly then suggested, only for him to blink.

"Carrot?"

"I remember eating it before, and it did help, I think?" She looked upwards to the ceiling. "My sister, she really likes bunnies and rabbits and those eat carrots. And we would really often eat carrot soup when we felt bad."

Giovanni hummed a bit, before he slapped his fist into his open palm.

"Alright! I can work with that!"

"Sounds good to me- "

"Ah, ah, no, you know what? Your throat is a goner."

Giovanni was already in the process of gathering the carrots on the counter as he looked over his shoulder at Sylvie, who was about to say something more. At this point he sounded twice as deep as he should and 100 percent rougher than he had any right to be.

"You, you no talky. You are banned from talking for now. You're going to sit on that couch, and I won't hear a single syllable out of your mouth," Giovanni ordered, Sylvie's murderous stare only chilling his neck the tiniest bit, "And you, Bear Trap, you are making sure he doesn't talk."

"But who helps you cook then?"

"Wait, you know what?" Giovanni snapped his fingers, completely ignoring her request. "You make sure he doesn't talk," then he pointed at the boy, who blinked a bit, "And you make sure she doesn't move an inch from the couch, how about that?"

Molly intervened, still not ready to give up quite yet: "We could also just not listen to you…? Since we are bad guy minions and stuff."

"I am your boss, Bear Trap, I'm the biggest bad guy." Then he switched gears, as he let his arms rest on his neck, carrots toppling over themselves into the sink, looking to the side. "Of course, I can't demand you to listen to me, since we're all villains." A discontent snort from Sylvie interrupts him. "But it would make me rather sad if you didn't take my idea to heart."

Molly backtracked so fast, Giovanni almost snorted in laughter, as she apologized, while Sylvie looked like he wanted to chime in, a smile tugging at his own lips at her tries. However, as he opened his mouth, Molly slapped her hand on it real fast, to make him stay quiet. For a moment Giovanni wondered if Sylvie would lick her hand to get her off, but of course he didn't, he was too nice to do that, only tapping her hand to be let go.

Well, nice to her, he would have done it if it had been Giovanni for sure, the little gremlin.

Giovanni actually couldn't remember the last time he had made soup from scratch.

Sure, of course he used his Epithet to make the liquid boil faster and he did cheat a bit with additional spices he didn't have on hand, (He needs to get his hand on ginger powder, he kept forgetting.) (So many bottles and of course he didn't have to one he needed…) (Sylvie had a point, where did his "magic" spice come from?), but it was just easier and faster that way after all.

That didn't mean he didn't like to experiment!

Since Bear Trap wanted carrots, it was a nice change from the usual tomato or chicken noodle most requested, and it was relaxing to peel and then to cut the orange sticks to bits while the two children were sitting one room over.

He checked once or twice to see what they were up to, only to find them like he left them the first time.

Molly was practically a burrito, curled up in two thin blankets, her boots off her feet and on the ground at one end of the couch. She leaned with her head against the arm rest, the remote in her fingers, every time the characters got louder or quieter, regulating the volume. She seemed mildly interested, since she mentioned to have seen the episode already, but was obviously not ready to change the program. Sylvie on the other hand was sitting pretty much, feet on the ground and head leaning back, watching with a blank look on his face. Giovanni had thrown one thick blanket over him, which was now draped over his stomach and arms and it seems like he hadn't moved an inch from under it. Either he was focusing on the story or he was so deep in thought that he entirely shut off, both could have been equally true.

Since Giovanni was letting the soup to simmer, and the kids were taken care of for now, he tried his luck once more in the bathroom cabinet, trying to find something to help. Molly needed something to get her nose free, he didn't want her to get a sore throat as well, if she kept breathing through her mouth. And for Sylvie, there had to be something to get that cough to stop, since the boy kept hacking for the past hour, and it was sure to hurt agonizingly at this point.

Giovanni was pretty glad his mom was always prepared for those kinds of things, and also that she wasn't here today.

He had made sure to call in to see how she was doing, realizing that his memory hadn't lied and that she actually would be out for the next few days. Since he really didn't want to explain what two sick children were doing in their house, he was glad that some power

rearranged itself to his liking. It's not like he didn't tell her that he made friends and that they were coming over from time to time, but did he really want to explain how a 12 and a 15-year-old ended up completely busted and were now trying to wait their illness out in their four walls?

He for sure didn't want to explain that.

After a moment of trying to remember where his mom usually put stuff, he found the cream for Molly's nose, letting out a soft cheer. That would help her breathe for sure, maybe she'd be up and about tomorrow, the only thing left her chaffed nose. Another brush of his hand through the packages left him with two sorts of cough drops, one for a sore throat, and one for a very sore throat. He took the later and made his way back down, just in time to see Molly finally change the animated program, switching between channels.

"You find anything good?"

"Not yet, it's all stupid."

She glanced over at Sylvie, her voice nasally, since it was completely stuffed again, asking for his opinion.

"You want to see some news?"

A shake of his head and Giovanni was actually surprised that he hadn't opened his mouth to answer. But maybe it was less because he wanted to listen to him and more because at this point it would have erupted a volcano in his voice chords. Whatever the case, he had just the right things to ease both of their problems, pressing the cough drop out of its package. Handing it to Sylvie went over without much fuss, him taking it with little resistance, popping it under his tongue. For Molly, he asked her if she wanted to put the cream on herself, which she nodded at, taking the little can.

In the background he could hear the soup simmer louder, but not quite ready yet, before Molly suddenly held the remote to his face. He took it with a risen brow, watching as her hand retreated to her nose spreading the white cream evenly around her upper lip.

"Can you choose something? I don't really know what to watch."

"If the program isn't any good, how about a movie?" He let the remote fall back onto her lap, as he walked forward and opened the drawer of the closet the TV was on. "I got some A+ action ones. Comedy and some old black and white stuff we got around here, too."

"Are there any with crime?"

"Absolutely! My heart swells to know you want to learn, Bear Trap! I knew you'd make a great minion boy!" He then stood up, and pulled a stack of CD's out, those also landing in her lap and all around her blanket. "Since I feel generous, and you are showing so much enthusiasm, you decide what we watch. You have made great decisions all afternoon, so we will faithfully follow your guidance today!"

Sylvie almost chocked on his cough drop at the theatrics, as he tried not to laugh out loud, face pressing into his one elbow, while Molly looked a bit helpless, an awkward giggle falling from her as she looked around herself. The chaos she was in made her feel lighter, her hand hovering above the cases, trying to find one that caught her attention.

“I’m not that good of a leader… But uhm…” Her eyes landed on a random blue one then, lifting it up, “Let’s take this one? It’s got a bear on it.”

“Good choice! You will love that one actually, there was a cartoon series about that bear, so they made two movies out of it.”

“Really?!”

“Yeah! Is it not around anymore? I watched that all the time when I was younger.” At the shake of her head, he sighed a bit. “Man, maybe I am getting old…”

“You’re 19?”

“That’s old apparently!”

Sylvie let out another pressed laugh, obviously amused at the fact that Giovanni was riling himself up, so he decided that it was time to pop that movie in to quiet them down. Wiggling himself into the middle afterwards, he pulled at Sylvie’s blanket, so all three could lay under it, remote back in Molly’s hands, so she could continue to play with the volume.

All three were engrossed in watching, when Giovanni reminded himself that there was still soup to take care of and he slid his way down to the carpet after one third of the movie. He didn’t want to move the blanket, even if the kids watched him confused as his butt made contact with the floor, before he stood up and made his way to the kitchen. He could still hear the TV fine, so he told Molly to keep it running, as he started to clean up most of his utensils, before he took the soup off the heat. It was ready and perfectly, piping hot for the children to warm up, so he made neither walk up to the kitchen table. Instead he filled the soup into mugs and made his way back over, handing them each one.

Molly thanked him with a bright smile and Giovanni had the urge to pet her head, only to remind himself that he still had two cups and those precariously balancing on his forearm. So, he took his free one and held both securely, before he nodded at the girl.

“Be careful, don't burn your tongue!”

She laughed at that and carefully navigated the cup to her lips, while Giovanni rounded the couch and held the cup to Sylvie’s face, who had watched but also somehow not realized that Giovanni had moved in front of him. He still looked a bit dazed as he took the cup, and both frowned at his shaky hands, suddenly aware that he was trembling all over.

“You are looking a bit more pale than usual there, bud.”

Giovanni didn’t wait on a response, as he already leaned forward and put a hand to the boy’s forehead, Sylvie grumbling a bit at the sudden intrusion, closing his eyes. However, he

seemed too exhausted to really fight him, as Giovanni, brushed his bangs to the side and pressed his thumb to the temple. He let out a small, low whistle then, his fingers not yet burning from the touch, but already getting to the red zone, figuring that he really had gotten it worse.

Molly interrupted them as she let out a satisfied hum, and Giovanni was back to grinning.

“Any good?”

“Well… I can’t smell that well yet, but I can still taste it, kind of!” She curled up tighter, mug carefully balanced on her knees, “It reminds me of our own carrot soup, but 30 percent better.”

“30 percent? Ha, next time, watch me! It will be 60!”

“What if it already was 70 and you reached 100?”

“Then I shoot for 200 percent!”

“That’s not possible.”

Giovanni glanced down, his hand finally lifting from the boy’s head as he reminded himself that his fingers were still in place there. However, Sylvie must have taken a sip in the meantime, even with the weight on him, ready once again to contradict him. He was glad that the cough drop must have helped somewhat, as well as the soup that would coat the rough patches up, if he was ready to say something snarky again.

“Course it is!” Giovanni struck a pose, as if readying his bat, “Just need to get my head in the game!”

At that Molly laughed, the snort sounding almost snot free.

He didn’t know what happened, but if he had to guess from the weird, dizzy,“only running in place from a giant pizza delivery man” dream he had, he was pretty sure he’d fallen asleep.

Giovanni tried first to stretch himself, trying to lift his arms in a try to wake himself up more, but he felt weight on both sides, glancing to his left. There was Molly, hugging his arm like one would a teddy bear, face snuggled into the crook of his elbow. Her one sheet was draped over her torso, while the other lay half-way over her head, her mop of hair hidden away under it. She had completely stretched herself out, one leg on the couch, while the other was hanging down and she sighed softly in and out in her sleep, sometimes the air slightly whistling.

When Giovanni looked to his other side, he found golden particles invading his sight and he rolled his eyes.

That explained the sudden black out he had.

Since Sylvie was pretty much pushing his whole weight into his side, he was coated in the yellow dust, brushing it away like pesky bugs, the clouds he was petting out wafting into the air. At least when it disappeared, it actually did, he really didn't have the patience to get a vacuum cleaner and suck the stuff up. It covered every inch of couch and carpet in a 2 feet radius and he petted everywhere were he could reach so it would dissipate. This time it looked like Sylvie must have knocked himself out and leaned to the side, before he landed on Giovanni's shoulder, glasses askew on his nose. They both were still sharing the blanket and he realized why he had woken up, the heat making him sweat uncomfortably, still trying to get the pollen substance to get lost.

He wished he could have used his steam, but ugh, heat.

First, he tried to peel his arm away from Molly and he replaced it with a pillow that had fallen to the carpet, hoping it would suffice in keeping her asleep. As that exchange was completed, he had one arm free to put it on Sylvie's shoulder, so he could push him away from him. As he did, he let him gently lay down on the opposite armrest, before he wiggled himself free from the blankets and stood, arms stretched above him. He let out a yawn, before he shook himself like a wet dog to get some air hitting his free skin, wondering how long he was out, before he turned the blue glowing screen off.

With the crick in his neck being taken care of with a small tilt of his head, he decided that he couldn't leave the two sleeping on the couch; as comfortable as it was, his bed was better.

After he waved the last of Sylvie's Epithet away from the air, careful to not sweep it into his eyes, he crouched down and put an arm around Molly's knees, the other under her shoulders, before he picked her up with blankets and pillow in her arms. For a moment he then tried to find balance, trying to settle her enough so he could walk up the stairs without jostling her too much. When he was satisfied, he made his way towards his room, nudging his door open with the tip of his foot, the wood creaking dangerously loud, but quiet enough for her not to startle awake. When he laid her down, he peeled her off her coat, but knowing she'd be upset if it wasn't close, he used it as blanket, Molly snuggling into the material once more.

Now he was able to pet her head, as he shushed her back into deeper sleep.

His second trip he'd planned to do the same way, lift the boy, carry him up, and since Giovanni's car bed was big enough, he'd just throw him right beside her. He could easily take the couch; maybe use the new yarn he'd bought just yesterday and stay awake to knit some more.

He stopped in his tracks and musings as his arm curled around Sylvie's shoulder however, startling a bit at the heat that was radiating there. The groan the smaller let out also didn't help, puffs of pollen flying from practically every inch off his skin, and Giovanni let him lay down once more, analyzing the situation. He had to wave the new dust away once again, frowning hard and wondering if he should just get a mask to not breath it in. While he pushed the particles around, he noticed that the glow had dulled, and he tried to catch a piece, the crumb floating in between his closed hands like a firefly. Noticing the weird texture of it, he took an even closer look, not entirely sure what it reminded him of.

His hand shook off the offending powder in disgust then, as he made the connection, gritting his teeth and spluttering.

“Ew! Is it molding?!”

He yelped out another disgruntled screech as the stuff landed on him and he wiped it off, so grossed out he was ready to throw his clothes into a fire pit. After another second of panicking, he got over himself and took a deep breath, trying to reason with himself that it, maybe, only looked like mold.

The kid wouldn’t poison himself in his sleep, right?

He gave it another shot, crouching down as he looked at one dust part on the couch, narrowing his eyes at it in suspicion. He supposed, if the boy was already affiliated with sheep, maybe it was just some sort of wool or something that coated the stuff, the grey resembling both very close. Maybe his Epithet was mixing stuff up, he couldn’t be sure, all he knew that it looked dull and the yellow turned into an ugly yellow green, a shiver going down his spine.

Putting his hand once more on Sylvie’s head when he deemed it safe, he waited a second, before he pressed it to his own, trying to gage how hot it was.

He was burning for sure, not more, but also not less than last time.

At least something.

He sighed a bit, before he let out a determined breath, crouching down once more and lifting Sylvie up. This time there was no hitch in his movement and the boy laid still as Giovanni pondered what he could do now. It didn’t seem like he was getting worse, and since he didn’t look uncomfortable, he was probably just pushing through the last bit of the bacteria flowing in his system. His Epithet was probably going into overdrive like most sicknesses did to Inscribed, and in his case that meant just knocking him out completely.

That was a good thing.

It meant he was resting.

Or at least he hoped so, since Sylvie mentioned that his stamina was still being drained when he made his sheep appear or a bigger (ha) example Beefton was used. Just because he was sleeping, didn’t mean he wasn’t using energy and just because his dreams were small and had some sort of free will, didn’t mean they didn’t depend on him as source. He knew for sure that Sylvie was always coated in a fine layer of sleeping dust, he had talked about it being a defense mechanism of sorts a while back. The doctor was used to it in certain amounts and usually build up thicker coats depending on where he was going. He had trained himself to be partly immune to it, hence why he didn't fall asleep on his feet all the time, but others would be put to sleep instantly if they got in contact.

Molly had told him as well, that this is what had happened when she bumped into him back at the museum, which honestly? Cool, Giovanni had to give him props for that. It was pretty

neat.

But back then he couldn't help himself but laugh also at the image in his head that Sylvie, when startled, just proofed up like a scared kitten, the dust flying into every possible direction. The boy had been blushing furiously, said that it was not cute and that he had worked hard on controlling his Epithet, after getting his Epiphany to settle it and not let his powder contaminate every room he walked into. But Giovanni had waved him off with a chuckle, anyway.

Right now however the coat on him was thumb thick, his hair pretty much matted with particles. All over his skin stuck the powder like a coarse sheet, cracking when there was movement, only to close itself by putting more dust in the crevices. It honestly looked like he had been downed in a bucket of wet glitter. If Giovanni had been a lesser man, he would have carried Sylvie like he had done at his apartment, one arm away from him so he wouldn't get in contact. His pride and also his worry made him carry the boy just like he had Molly however, the head on his shoulders heavy as he glanced down at him, his face slack.

Giovanni cursed under his breath, as he slid the curled-up boy slowly down beside Molly.

Then he put the back of his hand on Sylvie's cheek, the heat radiating, before he went back to his forehead for the upmost time. He seemed completely out of it, his chest falling and collapsing heavily, sweat rolling down his temple and Giovanni worried that he was actually burning himself out, his powers going haywire. There was already a small cloud that lead back to the living room, a small trail from where he had carried him, and it started to affect him, Giovanni slapping his own cheeks to stay alert.

For a moment Giovanni struggled to come up with a solution to help, his sleepy mind going all over the place, trying to remember if being hot helps a fever or if that was only for colds, before he decided that Sylvie was going to literally burn if he didn't cool him down.

He could always put him in the bath.

But he was sure Sylvie would scream bloody murder if he undressed him and, man, Giovanni had not the energy to put up with a punchy, drowsy boy. He wasn't even sure if he had the energy to pick him up again, his eyes getting heavy.

He needed first to get out and take a big breath of fresh air and then go back in with a plan.

Ten minutes later he came walking in with a freezer pack wrapped in a towel, a bucket of lukewarm water and a washcloth, settling it beside the bed, only then to look up and almost let out a loud coo at the sight in front of him.

In the few minutes he was gone, Molly had somehow managed to ditch the pillow and instead wrapped herself around Sylvie's left arm, clinging to it like her life depended on it. Giovanni was surprised she didn't mind the sleeping dust or the heat, since the boy had turned into an over-bearing, living oven, but again, she was always wearing her coat.

Maybe she froze faster than them, he had to make sure to ask her at some point; he could knit her some sweaters, or some thicker leggings. Maybe he could get that sweater for Molly

started today, if he was already thinking about working a bit. His new yarn was a really nice shade of forest green, and if he wove in some patterns in white or brown, that would surely fit her.

Oh, she'd love a tiny Teddy pattern around the wrists, that could be fun.

Sylvie however had curled up tighter into a ball, not unlike he had been in Beefton's torso, laying on his side so he could face Molly. His glasses where somewhere on his head, but for sure not on his nose, by now and Giovanni pulled the frames from his ears carefully, before he lay them on his desk, put away safely.

He tried to make him stretch out and lay down on his back so he could help him cool off, but unconsciously he kept turning into a ball and Giovanni groaned under his breath. He sighed a bit, before he started tugging at Sylvie's sleeves, peeling him out of his doctor's coat first. As he lifted it, another shower of grey gold rained down and it made Molly sneeze so adorably that Giovanni's heart almost burst, trying not to let out a laugh. When he folded the piece away, knowing he was going to beat the heck out of it later to clear it out, he tried once more to let Sylvie lay flat, the resistance still as strong as ever.

"Alright, Sylvester, your way then."

He grumbled, but he let him go for a second, waiting for Sylvie to turn back into a turtle in his shell. When he did, he took it upon himself to flip him, so this time he would lay with his back to Molly. One arm was awkwardly bend behind him, since Molly refused to let go, the other curled around his chest, but that had to do as Giovanni took the washcloth and dunked it quietly into the water. Then he proceeded with cleaning the powder from the boy's face, careful to no wake him as he petted him down. It seemed to help, Sylvie relaxing his shoulders the slightest amount, as Giovanni continued with his arms, pulling the hoodie sleeves back as far as he could, hands, neck, before he wringed the whole thing, water splashing back into the bucket, turning it first murky and then more and more golden. Once or twice the powder reappeared on his skin, but with every swipe, there was less, until the usually one-layer coat he had learned to notice stayed put.

Then he navigated around his face once more, taking strands and trying to catch the few glittery parts that hung around there. It turned out a little bit less fruitful, and he decided now it would be a good idea to form the slightest bit of steam, just to blow the stuff away. Right after he tuned the boy around once more, his arm probably tickling with ants the way he had laid on it, putting the freezer pack on his forehead as last step.

He tried as best as he could, the angle less than helpful, but at least decent enough to cover it.

That didn't do much either, both kids way too down under, but Giovanni at least felt accomplished as they slept peacefully. He considered for a second to take a picture, but that would have been kind of mushy as he pulled the blanket over them instead, halfway to their waists, so they wouldn't start to get too warm. Taking his equipment, he nudged the door again to get out, putting it all where it belonged, before he settled down in the living room.

It took another ten minutes for him to go back and take a picture anyway.

Chapter 3: Appreciating Giovanni Hours

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Giovanni was knitting away, hands moving fluidly up and down, too awake after the long nap to really get back to sleep. When he noticed the sun peeking through the window, he just gave it a small shrug, no exhaustion to shake off whatsoever. Looking away from the light, he squinted at a half-finished portion of a soon to be sleeve, looking at it with a critical eye, as if he was checking if he missed a loop somewhere. After all, he couldn't mess up if it's going to be a gift to one of his faithful minions, and when winter came around, it would be perfect to give it to her before the first snowfall.

When he deemed it perfect and nothing less, he settled it beside him, letting his legs stretch to get the muscles back in place. Deciding he could stand up for a bit to get some feeling back into his limbs, he went upstairs to check on the two, the quiet of morning shifting the house into a hazy state. Walking in he was glad the shutters were only half-way down, the sunlight filtering through with a soft glow, so he could see where he was stepping.

The two were still too adorable for him to take.

Molly had shifted onto her stomach during the night, outstretched like a little starfish, one arm curled around the pillow, the other hand clasping Sylvie's wrist. She practically lay on his arm, head stuck between deciding if it wanted to lay on the mattress or his chest. Sylvie on the other hand was still curled up, but looser, shoulder blades now actually touching the mattress, entangled in the blanket like it was a snake, curling around his leg and torso, up to his neck. Molly seemed now to be able to breathe through her nose, no whistling or heavy intakes of oxygen from an open mouth to hear, and Giovanni sighed a bit in relief.

Kneeling down to inspect the boy next, he was satisfied with his finding, the heat back down to a normal level, no sleeping dust to be found. Sylvie for sure looked ruffled and was probably dead tired still, too, but at least he wasn't spreading anymore of the moldy cloud substance, which meant he was actually sleeping.

Success.

However, when he stood up, his hand leaving the cheek he had been checking, Sylvie stirred at the loss of contact and he snapped his eyes open. Giovanni didn't exactly jump, but he did lean back a bit, as he watched Sylvie struggle to figure out where he was, his eyes trying to adjust and never getting anywhere, the blurry images mixing into each other. For a moment he looked thoughtful, Giovanni watching him as he tried to pull his arm free, only for Molly to grab it harder, not ready to let go. When Sylvie realized, he heaved what sounded like a relieved sigh, before he started to pet with his free hand around the mattress, probably trying to find his glasses, which he probably thought he might have lost during the night.

Giovanni quietly retrieved them from his desk, before he unceremoniously shoved them onto Sylvie's nose himself, who let out a surprised squeak, only now noticing him.

“Morning, sunshine.”

The small, low grunt Sylvie let out was his only answer, as his head leaned back into the pillow, as if he was trying to sink into it to hide.

“Throat still down for the count or are you just being rude?”

Instead of agreeing or denying, Sylvie pushed first his glasses up his nose, so they would lay more comfortably on the bridge, before he then kicked the blanket from him, trying to free himself. Slowly pulling his arm back, not unlike Giovanni yesterday, he replaced it with another pillow for Molly to cuddle with, before he swung his body up without missing a beat. In the process the warm icepack landed in his lap as he rubbed his eyes with the back of his hands.

He didn’t look particularly stoked to be awake, heck, Giovanni was sure he should stay in bed and get some more z’s, but instead he let him do as he wanted, watching as he threw his legs over the side of the bed as quietly and smooth as he could to not move Molly. He was about to stand up, but thought better, as he opened his mouth instead.

“I’m fine.”

Oh, that hurt his ears.

Giovanni pretty much cringed away from him, believing him exactly zero percent.

“Yeah, no,” Giovanni grimaced, his whispering getting a bit pressed, “That sounded like a truck that tried to rev up in the middle of the desert. Man, if you were fine, your voice wouldn’t sound like it came from some pit of hell cave.” Then he extended a hand to his throat, Sylvie looking up at him, a tad confused by the touch. “Does it hurt? Is swallowing at least fine?”

“Of course.”

Giovanni didn’t miss a beat, as he narrowed his eyes: “Do it.”

With great difficulty Sylvie did do a swallow and Giovanni could feel the amount of fire that must have started under his palm, narrowing his eyes further.

“You are begging me to hit you over the head, you know that, right?”

Sylvie crossed his arms at that, looking incredibly unimpressed by the threat, but restraining to say something back. Giovanni had to snort at that, as he stood up from his kneeled position and ruffled his hair, on one hand of course to make him squirm and bat his arms away like a toddler, but also because he was relieved that he was back on his feet.

He might have been the tiniest bit scared yesterday, after all.

“Come on, dork, if you are done with slapping my wrist, how about we try to get that voice of yours into control? I’ll give you another one of those cough drops. I’ll see if I have that

gross spray too, so I can shove that down your throat." He looked up at the ceiling, "No idea what that stuff is called… Chroma-something?"

"Chloraseptic."

"That's the one!" Giovanni snapped his fingers, before he hushed himself for Molly's sake with a wince and pointed down, "Also please shut your mouth now. I am literally getting anxiety from it."

It had been around half an hour since he had given Sylvie another cup of soup, before the boy shut down and was back to dozing, Giovanni rolling his eyes.

He had told him multiple times to just go lay back down again, to get more rest, but no, Mr. Mature wanted to stay awake and try to weasel his way home and to work. But Giovanni was not born yesterday, and he realized really fast that he had just looked for a way to escape. Since Sylvie did have people that counted on him to be at his office, Giovanni felt the tiniest bit bad for making him stay, but he was damned if he let the boy run himself thin.

Hell, he wasn't sure for how long he had an office, didn't he just graduate or something?

Whatever the case, Sylvie had fallen asleep in the recliner beside him and he was going to leave him exactly like that until either lunch was in order or he woke himself up.

The later will probably happen, but Giovanni could hope.

As he shook his head, he lifted a brow, a small tipper-taper of someone walking reaching his ears.

At this point he had trained himself to listen to the quietest of noises, knowing both to be soft walkers. If Sylvie hadn't been laying right beside him, he couldn't have said who exactly it might have been, both children equally, horrendously silent on their feet. Every time he tried to differentiate between the two it was impossible, both sounding identical without their shoes on. If they had them on, Molly's heel would give a soft click, while Sylvie's would give an equally soft thud, but a click and thud were different.

Socks had no soles, and since Sylvie was out cold right there, he just stared from behind the couch, Molly making her way down.

She didn't see him from where she was standing and he watched her as she walked into the kitchen, probably to get a glass of water. He frowned, wondering why she hadn't used the bathroom, which had been literally one room over from his, before he realized, right. Maybe she was still out of it and thought she was at home, and there she had to go downstairs if she wanted to drink something.

When she came back through the door with a glass in hand, she seemed to be a little lost and Giovanni decided this was a good time to call out to her.

"Hey, Bear Trap."

“Boss?” she blinked sleepily at him, before she glanced around the room, “Oh yeah.”

“You slept well?”

Molly practically moseyed her way over, so slow a sloth could have won a race between them, rubbing her eyes as she sat beside him. He didn’t hide his knitting stuff, since it was nowhere near done and if she asked, he could just say he was making a scarf.

“Actually, yeah,” she answered, her yawn stretching her mouth wide, hand hovering to cover it and only partly being successful, “It’s been really cozy. Did you put me to bed?”

Giovanni nodded, continuing his knitting: “Yeah, couldn’t leave you on the couch after all. I just worried you might sweat beside Sylvie; his fever has been running into over-drive during the night.”

“Oh? I didn’t notice. I woke up for a second or something and curled up around him,” Molly murmured, before she leant back, glass tightly held in her hands as she tipped it up to drink, “Or maybe I did, I was really thirsty when I woke up.” A gulp was made, “But when I woke up, no one was there anymore.”

“He woke up earlier, gave him something to keep the pain down and he refused to go back to bed. His sleeping dust got a bit out of control yesterday, so his stamina is down for the count.” Giovanni glanced towards Sylvie, as he huffed, “Don’t think he will stay asleep, he just keeps shaking himself awake.”

“Is that why I can’t remember how I fell asleep?” A pause. “Is that why I had that weird dream of a dog destroying the city, because it was playing fetch?”

“Was it a normal sized dog?”

“That’s why it was weird.”

“Yep.”

“Eh, good thing actually. I slept like a rock, that was nice.” Then Molly let out a yawn once more. “Just the waking up part is still a hassle. The last time he used it on me made me feel dizzier afterwards, too.”

Giovanni, hummed, before he shrugged: “No clue, it’s probably part of it. His Epithet IS drowsy after all.”

“True.”

A comfortable silence then engulfed them, Molly sipping her water while Giovanni pulled at the yarn, the clicking of the needles against each other the only thing to break the quiet. Molly had stretched herself out at some point, legs landing on Giovanni’s lap, as she played with the empty glass above her head. For a second Giovanni wanted to take it, in fear she would let it fall on her face, but then let it be, knowing she could just dumb the pain down. Plus, it looked like her nose was, even if chaffed, completely clear now, as he observed her breathing.

“How’s the nose?”

“Better.” She threw the glass up, for an inch, then caught it again between her hands. “The cream helped a lot. It just burns a bit now, but I can smell again.” She paused, before she sat up and settled the glass on the coffee table, her hands folding on her lap. “Thank you for taking care of me. Of us, really.”

“Psh,” he waved her off, his head lolling away from her as his lips curled into a grin, “T’was nothing!”

Molly just moved to his side and gave him a hug in response, which he took easily, curling his arms around her small frame.

“Thank you so much for caring.”

Giovanni immediately had wet tears threatening his eyes, which he forced back with all his might, not wanting to go all emotional on her at 10 in the morning. Instead he pulled her higher up and petted her head, trying to convey to her silently that it was no problem, that he would always run over if she needed him and that he would drop anything for that to happen. She seemed to understand as she brought her head to his shoulder and pressed it down.

There they sat then for a long moment and two more, Molly moving down and pressing her face to his chest afterward for one last short hug.

Giovanni squeezed her shoulders then, petting them kindly, before he let her go, put his knitting stuff beside him and told her he’d heat up the soup for her breakfast. She gave a thumbs up, before he made his way to the kitchen.

Only what felt a minute after he heard the two children start a conversation, Sylvie’s voice careful but soft and he sighed a bit, relaxing further.

“I don’t see why we should do this.”

“Then, tell me, why should we not do this?”

“I have multiple answers to that, but none of them would convince you to stop.”

“Good! So, your question is in stalemate!”

“Do you even know what chess is…?”

The pout Giovanni gave made Molly grin a bit, while Sylvie still looked a bit unsure, mumbling under his breath. It’s been a few hours since breakfast and also been a few hours of Molly watching TV, Giovanni knitting and Sylvie dropping in and out of consciousness. And honestly, Giovanni was getting bored to death.

So, when Sylvie startled back into the world of living for the he assumed 7th time, his voice a ton better after Giovanni had drugged him with 3 different kinds of cough syrups and half the pot of soup, he told them to standup and search for all the blankets in the house. Instructing

them to throw the pillows down on the living room floor in front of the stairs, a considerable pile had made its home there, all three of them standing around it.

“I like the idea,” Molly then threw in her two cents, before she paused, “But I’m not sure about the whole, you know, riding down the stairs into a bunch of pillows part.”

“Did you guys never have the need to get a flat board or something, get on top of your house stairs and ride that sucker down?”

“No.”

“You don’t count, poindexter, you never do anything fun.”

At the little squawk, Giovanni held his hands up, trying to calm him.

“Look, if I were more of a bookworm, sure, I’d agree, those can be fun. But!” He gave a dramatic pose, pointing to the ceiling as if he was declaring war, “I am Giovanni Potage! An adventurer and crime loving evil-doer at heart!” Then he stood normally again. “Which entails riding down a bunch of stairs into a mountain of pillows.”

“If you were an adventurer, wouldn’t you leave the pillows out?”

“Safety is more important.”

“Very evil of you.”

“I know, right?!”

Molly gave a giggle at their back and forth, amusing herself to no end at their expense. She never had the need to do what Giovanni wanted either, but it sounded like a bunch of fun, gripping the wooden panel Giovanni had pushed into her hands tightly. It looked like it had been part of a crate at some point (Did he take that with from the museum? … She better didn’t ask) and it was big enough for her to sit on as well to engulf two steps. At the sides were strings attached, held on by military tape, so she had something to grip. Giovanni had told her she could be first, since Sylvie was still too much of a chicken to try it out, which made the doctor speak up defensively once more, before she made her way up.

She wasn’t exactly anxious, but it was kind of a long way down.

But with the number of pillows, there was no way she could get hurt, even if Sylvie had insisted to let counting sheep appear, shot down by the older that he was out of stamina and not in any condition to do so. Plus, Giovanni was right there, he would make sure she was fine if something did happen. Also, only as her second thought, which honestly said a lot about the fact that she trusted them more than she did herself, her Epithet would keep her safe if she fell and hit the stairs weird. Readying herself, she put the panel down and sat, one tilt forward away from sliding down.

“Alright, Bear Trap! On your mark!”

“I still think this is unnecessary.”

“We’ll see how unnecessary this was after you had your turn.”

Molly then started inching forward with small hops, a small chill rising at the back of her neck. She waited for a moment, before the next hop brought her out of balance and the wood tilted down. For a second she thought about what would happen if the panel got stuck; would she catapult down and miss the pile? But then she accelerated and let out a partly scared, partly delighted yelp, as she slid down the stairs.

The noise was really bad, the rattling shaking her bones, but she was sure she had never been this fast in her life.

The next moment she arrived at the foot, the wood catching itself in a gap between ground and blankets and she flipped into the pillows with her back, a hearty laugh leaving her. The boys had stood with their hands outstretched, but let them fall to their sides, Giovanni grinning at her brightly.

“Told you it would be fun!”

“Can I go again?!”

“Of course! Go shred it, minion!”

And up she went again, almost toppling over her own feet in her try to get out of the pile and on hard ground.

After the third time of doing this, she held the panel up to Sylvie’s face, telling him to give it a try, her excitement overflowing. Sylvie took it with a bit of hesitation, still not comfortable with the fact that they were riding down a slope out of hard edges, but he had to admit; it looked really fun.

Giovanni couldn’t help himself as he looked up at Sylvie’s form sitting on the panel like he was strapped to a death bringing vehicle. He was sure, if he had been closer to see properly, his knuckles must have been turning white by now.

“It only looks steep! It’s not bad!” Molly, reassured from down below, Sylvie looking even more unsure.

“Easy for you to say…”

“It is easy!”

“Come on, scared-y cat! It’s just stairs!” Giovanni butted in as well.

Sylvie groaned as he was peer pressured to inch forward.

Giovanni didn’t ask for a turn, too excited by their excitement, as Sylvie shook himself and asked to go again, not unlike Molly had. He didn’t even think about giving it a try himself, since both children went to it for like an hour, trying to figure out how to get faster and also to see how many flips they could do when landing on the soft pile. The only thing he did was to remind them to not get over-zealous and hurt themselves, not wanting them to become

reckless in their tries. Especially when they tried to skate down, immediately telling them no and to get their butts on the panel or they would not get to continue.

He was the one to try to snowboard down then, and let's say, the kids learned from his mistake, as he pushed himself off the pile he had landed in face down, wood panel laying somewhere between couch and kitchen door.

Molly was starting to slip into her shoes as Giovanni hovered above her, an unhappy grimace making its way across his face.

"You really want to go home now?"

"Yep!" She slipped on her other shoe. "I'm all better now and school is starting tomorrow! I still need to prepare some stuff and go to bed."

"Yeah, but you could just go from here?"

Molly looked a tad sad but was pushing through it with a smile: "I'd love to. My stuff is at my house though, and I really should finish my homework. I don't want my teacher to worry or get mad."

Giovanni just mumbled under his breath that he should have taken her little backpack with, before he relented.

"Fine. Just make sure this time you go to sleep at a reasonable time, alright? No Sunday evening selling, you hear?"

"I heard!"

Then she stood up from her crouched position and gave Giovanni another big hug, circling her arms as well as she could around his torso. He bent a little down to do the same, petting her back in reassurance, before he lifted her up and swung her around in a circle. When that was done, Molly giggling, she went over to Sylvie, who was standing by, his face neutral as can be. He was probably just as upset that she was leaving, but for some reason he was really poker face about it.

Maybe he was also just tired, exhausted from fever and also playing around the stairs for 2 hours. He was probably not used to it, heck, when was the last time he had fun before he met them?

Giovanni buried the thought right then and there.

Receiving a hug as well, Molly putting her chin on Sylvie's shoulder while he had his arms around hers, they just stood there for a while, Giovanni watching them as discreetly as he could, acting as if he was cleaning his fingernails. Then Molly was about to step out, before she stopped in her tracks in the same exact second, as if remembering something and digging through her coat. Then she pulled the can of cream out and she sheepishly laughed.

"I almost forgot to give it back!"

“Here I thought you might try to get into robbery, Bear Trap!” Giovanni laughed, “Crime never sleeps!!”

“It sure doesn’t, but I’ll put it back, don’t want to steal from my boss.”

With that she sprinted upstairs, both boys watching as she disappeared behind the ceiling, hearing her open the bedroom door. Giovanni felt already queasy not seeing her, the fact of her walking home alone spreading in his mind, his gut not comfortable with the idea at all. She had said he had already done so much; she couldn’t ask him to get her all the way back, which was the weakest excuse he ever heard. Of course he would have brought her home, that would have been no problem at all, but she was insistent, almost sounding guilty.

In those moments he wished he had his own car instead of borrowing it all the time, he could have just driven her there without anybody feeling bad about anything at all.

“Welp, it will be only two of us now, huh, nerd?”

“I was thinking of leaving as well, actually.”

Giovanni wasn’t surprised at all, and still he asked: “You sure? Molly is fine. You I am still on the fence about.”

“I feel better.” At the suspicious look he rolled his eyes. “I actually am, my throat is still sore, but nothing that tea at home won’t fix.”

Still a bit unhappy with that answer, Giovanni shrugged.

“It’s not like I actually kidnapped you or something, and since you can snark back at me, I deem you not 100, but around 80 percent alright. Which… eh?” He shook his hand in a so-so manner, tilting his head a bit to the side. “But you pass.”

Sylvie just lifted an eyebrow: “How very generous of you.”

“So… want me to get you home at least?”

“That won’t be necessary, I am capable of getting home myself.”

“You kids really are some of the biggest, worst workaholics I have ever met in my entire life. There is no way you are going straight home. I am sure, the moment you step out, you’ll meander your way to the office, aren’t you?” Giovanni sighed a bit frustrated, “That’s no life the two of you are leading.”

Sylvie didn’t answer, too focused on getting his coat on that had been spread out on the recliner seat since morning, or more likely purposefully ignoring Giovanni’s tone. When he clasped the sides of it to pet out, he blinked a bit confused at the lack of powder that would usually fall to the ground. His confusion was so visible, Giovanni couldn’t help himself but explain.

“Yeah, I beat my bat against it a few times, that thing was caked in the stuff.”

“Well, thanks? That was nice of you,” Sylvie replied unsure how to take that information.

“No big. Your dust stuff is pretty cool actually. I thought for a second to grab a handful and put in a bag for my own self-defense, but it literally vanishes the second you touch it.” Giovanni put a hand to his chin. “Would have come in handy for sure.”

“The last time you made fun of it.”

“Yeah, I made fun of the fact that you explode a dust cloud when someone comes near you like needle to a balloon, but the defense part is neat.”

“Oh. Huh.”

Sylvie hesitated, his coat back on his person, before he put his hands into his pockets.

“Your Epithet isn’t too bad either.”

“For real now?”

Giovanni had expected a lot now.

A fierce no, a stammered excuse, some kind of getaway topic to leave the theme they were headed towards to; he had a lot of options in mind where Sylvie would and could go to. But it was for sure not a compliment, Giovanni almost a bit speechless as the boy simply nodded, agreeing with him for once.

“People can say what they want, but you are incredibly creative with a word that has… not a lot of expectations. I think, us healing as fast as we did was thanks to it as well. You may not have used your Epithet fully, and still it pretty much healed us up.”

“Duh…” Giovanni murmured, only to cross his arms, not entirely sure, “I always experiment with stuff, and healing was one of the first that come to mind. It’s SOUP, after all, it’s made to make people feel better, give them energy and warm them up. What else could it do? Burn people?” He paused. “That, too, obviously, but that was second on my mind back then when I figured it out.”

“That… actually speaks volumes about you.”

Giovanni scratched his cheek, almost embarrassed at that straightforward declaration.

“It’s stupid, my soup only heals during battle well for some reason. After a fight or fevers and that kind of stuff, it takes so much longer.”

“What?” Sylvie laughed, the softest Giovanni had heard him yet, as if he couldn’t believe him and what he was saying. “One full day is long to you? Other people would be down for the count for a week with an abused throat like mine.”

“It could be faster… If I put more effort into it, I might be able to.”

Sylvie shook his head, before he huffed: “Completely broken bones and viruses are not the same as a scrap to the knee. And it did help, there is no way around it.”

Giovanni watched the other squirm, as if he still had something on his mind, before the boy heaved a sigh and seemingly jumped over his own shadow.

“I’m sorry I called your Epithet stupid, back at the barn. That… was uncalled for.” He rubbed his neck, eyes fixated on the carpet. “Even if you put us into danger, you also saved us back there; it was fun. And now you took care of us. You didn’t have to and still… You might even get the same bug we had.”

“I haven’t been sick a single day since I got my Epiphany, no idea if that correlates or not, but don’t worry your head.”

Sylvie almost immediately narrowed his eyes, looking the other up and down, hand over his mouth in thought, and Giovanni rolled his eyes.

“Yeesh, your brain never shuts up, does it now? Calm down, Sylvester, if you want to experiment, we can do that later, like honestly… Take a break for a single minute in your life.”

“… Thank you, for everything,” Sylvie only replied, shoulders sagging and looking to the side.

“Shucks. That’s the second time I hear that today…” Giovanni told him, the smile on his face wide and genuine, “Didn’t expect to hear it from you as well.”

And since he knew how awkward the boy could be, he was the one to initiate a hug, Sylvie stiff as a board, before he relaxed, forehead hitting Giovanni’s chest. It didn’t take long for him to lift his arms and embrace him then, his breath heavy as Giovanni pet him on the head in comfort, staying silent as he let the boy take it in first.

A pet to the shoulder later, the both of them separating once more, Giovanni grinned a bit, his hand moving forward to ruffle Sylvie’s hair.

“You can be actually nice to me when you want to.”

“I will bite your hand off.”

The threat was completely empty, so Giovanni just ruffled him harder, before it suddenly turned into a wrestler choke, rubbing his knuckles against Sylvie’s scalp.

The younger started yelling and barking out to be released immediately, trying to kick him in the shins, but Giovanni was much taller, so he just lifted him off the ground. When Molly peeked downstairs, all she could see was Sylvie trying to escape as Giovanni held him up by the waist, his hair even more of a mess than it had already been. She rolled her eyes in amusement as Sylvie knocked his elbow into Giovanni’s stomach, him letting out a miserable groan as he let go, before he declared him as cheater, jumping forward as if ready to knock him down to the floor. Molly couldn’t help herself, letting out a snort as she watched them

scuffle, only then for Giovanni to let the other go as a sudden cough made its way out. This time it was a dry one and he petted him on the back, Sylvie telling him he would get revenge at some point.

From one hundred to zero and back to the balanced fifty in a blink of an eye.

When she made it downstairs, ready to walk home, Sylvie told her he would come with and Giovanni was ready to follow the two. She tried, once again, to make him stay, and even though she had won the battle half an hour ago, she was losing the war, Giovanni knowing she had to bend. She wasn't too unhappy about it obviously, since she skipped her way out of the door, Sylvie following only a bit calmer, while Giovanni turned to close the door. He had the keys to both their homes still in his pockets and told them he had the power over their destination, no office and no staying at the register.

And Giovanni couldn't be happier as they agreed, the three of them walking through the city, this time making sure they would come home safely. He won't be making the same mistake twice, after all: the next time they went on an adventure, he'd be the one to throw them into bed, that was for sure.

Chapter End Notes

There we go, that was fun! Really needed to get that little fluff bunny out of my system.

End Notes

Try to rip the family trope out of my hands, you can't

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